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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

Statement submitted by the Women's National Commission, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The Women's National Commission (WNC) is the official independent advisory body giving views of women to the UK government. The WNC has more than 300 member organisations drawn from women's professional associations, voluntary bodies, political parties, trade unions and religious groups all over the country.

In a world where armed conflict is escalating, it is acknowledged by all those involved in global governance that the role of women in peace, conflict and post-conflict is vital.

Women are now recognised as: key in identifying signals of impending conflict; the major victims of the disaster of warfare; the glue that holds together societies being torn apart by conflict; the survivors who build again their villages, towns and lives of their families through force of will and working together. Yet they are rarely seen when decisions are being made. Having destroyed the infrastructure of countries and emotionally and physically abused children through the increasing use of child soldiers, it is often the same men who wrought the havoc, who can be found at the peace table.

The 300 organisations that are partners of the Women's National Commission call upon the member states to implement all aspects of Security Council Resolution 1325. Although the UN has achieved a great deal to ensure that women play a larger part within its structures, there are still not enough women in senior positions such as Special Envoys, Commissioners and in decision making roles at every level. Women's experience needs to be an integral part of all decisions in preventing conflicts, resolving them and peace building. Peacekeeping forces do not have a high representation of women either as members or as advisers. The gender sensitising training of peacekeeping forces has not progressed sufficiently nor has there been adequate publication of monitoring or evaluation. The examples of abuse by peacekeeping forces are a betrayal of those people whom they were expected to protect and of the authority and good will of the United Nations. Measures must be brought into force which will ensure that training of peace-keeping forces is improved and abuses are punished. Immunity from prosecution is not an option. All states must accept the overarching authority of the International Criminal Court.

Women have kept families and communities together in times of trial and difficulty. After an ordeal, they are integral to rebuilding anew lives shattered by the devastation of conflict. In recent times, these conflicts have become more barbarous. To build, overcoming hopelessness and bitterness, requires what many may have termed in the past "super-human" strength. Yet we see, almost as common practice, women working together across barriers building bridges of friendship and recreating the trust that is essential for harmonious living. These endeavours have resulted in a huge diversity of projects providing guidance, help, support and practical help in every place where there was once conflict.

Why is it then that this strength is not used to its full capacity? Is it not time that those in positions of power dedicate themselves to ensuring that women are always included and encouraged to participate actively at the time of negotiations while peace is being made, and thereafter when the country is being rebuilt. The qualities that women bring to post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction are qualities absolutely essential to lasting peace.

The Beijing Platform For Action states in sections 142 through to 149 numerous objectives and actions for governments and the international community, but little real progress has been achieved. Signing UN SCR 1325 was a crucial step in the right direction. But the time for hyperbole and declamation is long since passed and the peoples of the world are now calling for the actions agreed to in 1995 and subsequently in 2000 to be turned into reality. Years go by and not much is achieved. Recalling the Mission Statement in the Platform For Action paragraph 4, "The Platform for Action requires immediate and concerted action by all to create a just and humane world based on human rights and fundamental freedoms", of 9 years ago, the WNC recognises the lost years are measured not only in human suffering at an individual level but in the loss of progress suffered by all humanity.

In today's world we have generations whose stolen childhoods cannot be returned and for whom using guns to kill in the front line was a nightmare not a game. If we wish to experience a world where such experiences are only a memory kept alive in museums of past horror, there is no choice but to ensure comprehensive implementation of UN SCR 1325.

We call on all member states and the UN to ensure that the commitments in UN SRC 1325 are included in training for all UN staff and peacekeeping forces; that a gender expert with specified resources is deployed in every peacekeeping operation to oversee implementation of UN SCR 1325; and that all member states involved in conflict resolution ensure equal representation of women in peacemaking negotiations and post conflict governance.